SAN JOSE

Akira Tana and Otonowa - Tohoku Ouen Tour

The devastating tsunami and earthquake in March 2011 that claimed 19,000 lives and displaced more than 300,000 in Northern Japan has become a distant memory. Yet, for those in the Tohoku region where the quake and tsunami had its greatest impact, many lives are still on hold as communities are being rebuilt, some not until 2025

Otonowa is a jazz quartet (of Japanese American and Japan-born musicians) led by renowned drummer Akira Tana, with Masaru Koga on reeds, percussion and traditional Japanese instruments, Art Hirahara on piano, and Noriyuki Ken Okada on bass.

The group came together after the earthquake to raise funds for earthquake victims. One of their concerts was streamed live, so that those in Japan could participate and understand the extent of support they had from Americans. Out of this effort grew Otonowa (SoundCircle), a recording project of jazz interpretations of traditional Japanese folk songs.

With help of volunteers and donors, Otonowa toured the Tohoku region and gave community concerts and clinics to high school students annually from 2013 with guest vocalist Saki Kono. Many participants were brought to tears upon hearing the folk songs, which provided an emotional connection to their homes, villages, the past, and the future.

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